

**Chairman Tom Davis**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Government Reform Committee Hearing,**  
**“The Need to Know: Information Sharing Lessons for Disaster Response”**  
**Thursday, March 30, 2006**  
**10:00 a.m.**  
**Room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building**

Good morning and welcome. I would like to welcome everyone to today’s hearing on information sharing and situational awareness during the management of an emergency. The purpose of this hearing is to reignite public discussion and debate on barriers to information sharing among agencies and highlight practices and procedures that could be effective in encouraging and enhancing information sharing among diverse entities.

The government needs to be able to identify threats of all types and meet or defeat them. Our success depends on collecting, analyzing, and appropriately sharing information found in databases, transactions, and other sources. Both the 9-11 Commission report and the Select Katrina Committee report made it clear there is a lack of effective information sharing and analysis among the relevant public and private sector parties.

We are still an analog government in a digital age. We are woefully incapable of storing, moving, and accessing information – especially in times of crisis. Many of the problems in these times can be categorized as “information gaps” – or at least problems with information-related implications, or failures to act decisively because information was sketchy at best.

Unfortunately, no government does these things well, especially big governments. The federal government is the largest purchaser of information technology in the world, by far, and one would think we could share information by now.

The 9/11 Commission found “the most important failure was one of imagination.” Katrina was primarily a failure of initiative. But there is, of course, a nexus between the two. Both imagination and initiative – in other words, *leadership* – require good information. And a coordinated process for sharing it. And a willingness to use information – however imperfect or incomplete – to fuel action.

With Katrina, the reasons reliable information did not reach more people more quickly were many. For example: 1) the lack of communication and situational awareness paralyzed command and control; 2) DHS and the states had difficulty coordinating with each other, which slowed the response, and 3) DoD lacked an information sharing protocol that would have enhanced joint situational awareness and communication between all military components.

Information sharing and situational awareness will always be predicates to an effective disaster response. With approximately 60 days remaining before the start of hurricane season on June 1, this hearing will examine how the lessons learned regarding information sharing in the context of law enforcement, counter-terrorism, and defense can be applied to disaster response.

Information sharing is the backbone of successful emergency preparation and response efforts. Historically, however, the federal government has been so compartmentalized, information sharing has been a pipe dream. The federal government is faced with the difficult task of transforming from a “need-to-know” information sharing environment to a “need-to-share.” In addition, the bureaucratic stovepipe arrangement in federal agencies restricts the government’s flexibility to analyze information quickly, assess the need for services, and respond effectively in emergency situations.

Government-wide information policy authority rests with the White House, in the Office of Management and Budget. I think the White House, through OMB, has a critical role in establishing and implementing policies and procedures for Federal information

sharing. Whether we are discussing disaster management, counter-terrorism, or law enforcement, overarching guidance and oversight to help federal agencies establish a structure for partnering with one another and local and state organizations.

Given the lessons learned from Katrina, emergency managers and officials are obligated to the American people to produce a more nimble, effective, and robust response to predictable natural disasters. How can we avoid the inadequate information sharing and murky situational awareness that characterized the governmental response to Katrina? Are impediments to more effective information sharing primarily technological, or structural, cultural, and bureaucratic in nature?

The Committee's hearing will include a review of the issues raised by the Select Committee Report. This hearing is not intended to review the facts surrounding Hurricane Katrina, but will use the disaster to highlight instances where collaboration and information sharing among agencies is lacking. In addition, the Committee will explore the barriers to effective information sharing, learn what entities—including state, local, defense, intelligence, homeland security, and industry—are particularly adept at information sharing; and examine the models, policies, and methods which have proven successful. Finally, the Committee is interested in learning about whether there is a need for additional legislation, guidance, procedures, or resources to facilitate the information sharing priorities outlined by the witnesses.

The Committee views this hearing as a new beginning on the road to improving information sharing among government agencies and between the public and private sectors. To this end, private sector stakeholders, and other key agency personnel, including representatives from the Department of Homeland Security and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, will be asked to testify at future hearings.